
NAWA SWARA: 9-Tone Gamelan Music under Construction

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Introduction/Abstract

The grandest feature among hundred-art forms presented for the famous Bali annual art festival is the annual Gong Kebyar competition, to which the major/ regent of each 9-regency/city throughout the island must allocate more than hundred millions of rupiah to defray the cost of such performance-art production. Yet many regent troupes, especially the winning groups, still indeed need to find additional budget in order to present their fullest scale and highest level of aesthetic expectations of the year. For example, in 2004, when gamelan troupe from Tegalliggah village presented Gianyar regency, the group spent no less than Rp. 245.000.000 (two hundred and fourtyfive million rupiah) in order to achieve its ideal to be the first winner.

Even before the inception of Bali art festival in 1979 such enthuaism in gamelan music has begun in 1915. From the 1960s onwards such prestigious gamelan performance was called Festival Gong, essentially the gamelan competition. Since the last decade, many composers graduating from the art institution, like Made Subandhi, Nyoman Windha, Made Arnawa, Ketut Swanditha, Ketut Cater, Wayan Nurjana, Darya, Agus, etc. have been creating masterpieces that employ richer tones and tunes than a single gamelan onchestra can traditionally provide. By skipping one key of the existing gamelan and then replacing it with vocal arts, sung lines or choir within the long interval of the adjacent tones, a new tuning / scale can be established well. This method is similar with the way a composer using additional tone between any two adjetion diatonic scale of *do, re, me, fa, so, la, ti*, etc. Since gamelan does not have the black keys as in piano, the composer has to use the artist's voice, *rebab* lute, or *suling* flute in lue of the 'black keys' to bridge the related tones. Consequently, the existing musical canon that regulates an ensemble to have only one scale is

not any longer true. Tuning deconstruction in Balinese gamelan is now in progress along with restructuring various related art forms in Bali. For example, the Gong Kebyar that is traditionally known only to have pelog scale can now be made to present a slendro scale; Gender Wayang metallophone ensemble that is traditionally known only to have slendro scale can also now be made to present a pelog scale. This is also true to other gamelan orchestra. Many composers often employ more than one gamelan orchestra in order to obtain more tune and tones. While the aesthetic ideal may be achieved, the burden is certainly larger to bring two ensembles instead of one, in addition to create more related problems in terms of the playing technique.

Pursuant to the increasing demands of additional tones and tuning, *Nawa Swara* is a newly made Gamelan with 9-tone system in one octave of the scale. Derived from Old Javanese language with Sanskrit inspiration, *nawa* means 'nine' and *swara* means tone, sound, or voice. Thus, *nawa swara* literary means 9-tones.

In applying for the multi-years grant research, *hibah bersaing*, from the Indonesian Higher Education with its Competitive Funding 2007-2009 policy, faculty members of ISI Denpasar have actively proposed the establishment of such new gamelan *Nawa Swara*. Successful applicants led by Hendra Santosa, a faculty member of Music (Karawitan) Department at ISI Denpasar, have been constructing the *Nawa Swara* gamelan for about one year. In this second year, the research proceeds into the phase of trying and perfecting the intended model before it will be concluded in the third forthcoming year to perform this new gamelan *Nawa Swara*.

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